

Hepatitis B

Last Revised: 10/2001

Hepatitis-B

Hepatitis-B is a disease primarily of the liver caused by the hepatitis-B virus.

Who gets this Disease?

In the United States, hepatitis-B is primarily a disease of young adults. Children can be infected during childbirth if the mother has the virus in her blood.

How is it spread?

Only blood, semen, vaginal fluids and saliva have been shown to be infectious. Most cases are transmitted by blood (i.e., getting blood from an infected person into the open skin or the eye, nose or mouth of another person) or through sexual contact. Note: Salivary transmission has rarely occurred and generally through bites.)

What are the symptoms and signs?

Hepatitis-B symptoms and signs include loss of appetite, tiredness, abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting and sometimes rash or joint pain. Jaundice (i.e., yellowing of eyes or skin) may be present in adults but it is often absent in children. Symptoms vary from none at all to severe illness.

Can a person have this disease without knowing it?

Yes. Some people may not have the illness serious enough to seek medical attention. People who contract hepatitis-B may become chronic carriers of the virus and continue to be infectious for life especially if they are infected as young children.

What is the treatment?

No medical treatment is effective for acute hepatitis-B. Most adults recover from hepatitis-B on their own.

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

1. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are contaminated with blood or other body fluids containing visible blood.
2. Wear disposable gloves when handling blood (e.g., nose bleeds, cuts) or blood/body fluid-soiled items, surfaces or clothing.
3. Wash hands immediately after contact with blood or other body fluids containing visible blood, even if gloves have been worn.
4. The hepatitis-B vaccination series has been recommended for all

infants born in New Hampshire since January 1992. Hepatitis-B vaccinations should be incorporated into the routine vaccination schedule for children. Vaccination consists of a series of three injections and can be started at birth or at the first visit to the physician.

5. The National Immunization Practices Advisory Committee (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against Hepatitis B. The first dose may be administered at birth. Minimum interval between dose 1 and 2 is 4 weeks. The third and final dose must be at least 4 months from the first and 2 months from the second. A child must be 6 months old to receive dose 3.

Who should be excluded?

Children and staff who have the hepatitis-B virus in their blood may attend and/or work in child care and schools. Hepatitis-B carrier children with risk factors (e.g. biting, frequent scratching, generalized dermatitis) should be assessed for exclusion on the individual basis.

Reportable?

Yes. Hepatitis-B is reportable by New Hampshire law.